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Editing by Enders cited as 'last straw'

By ALFONSO CHARDY
Herald Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — A few days before being ousted as the State Department's senior specialist on Latin America, Thomas Enders ordered a softening in the tone of a report on left-wing insurgencies in Central America, according to U.S. military and intelligence sources.

The original paper, before it was presented to the press with State Department modifications, had been prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency and the Pentagon.

Although the changes were not substantial and did not alter the essential thrust of the 17-page document, they did anger CIA Director William Casey and Pentagon officials who helped prepare the report.

The episode has been cited as "the last straw" in Enders' abrupt replacement May 27, the same day that the report — entitled "Background Paper: Central America" — was issued at a press briefing by State and Defense Department officials.

Reporters who attended the session sensed something was amiss when Enders, who usually conducted briefings related to Central America, did not appear. Journalists were told that a shift in schedules had prevented him from attending.

A few hours later, Secretary of State George Shultz — traveling with President Reagan aboard Air Force One from Washington to the Williamsburg economic summit — announced that Enders was being replaced as assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs.

The sources, familiar with the original material drafted at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., and at the Pentagon's defense intelligence unit, say the changes ordered by Enders resulted in the removal of the equivalent of at least three pages in the report.

The sources said Enders also had at least three sections in the document dealing with Cuba, Nicaragua and Guatemala partially edited to reflect more neutral language.

A comparison of some of the original material made available to The Herald with that contained in the public report indicates only subtle differences in the two documents.

In the Guatemala segment, for example, the change involved two lines and 10 words in the opening paragraph.

The original document said:

"In Guatemala, although there was increased guerrilla activity in the months preceding the elections, this violence failed to disrupt the national elections of March 7, 1982. A widespread, but unconfirmed, perception of extensive electoral fraud by the government led to a junior officer coup on March 23, 1982."

The final document, with the change noted (italics added by The Herald), read:

"In Guatemala, although there was increased guerrilla activity in the months preceding the elections, this violence failed to disrupt the national elections of March 7, 1982. A widespread, but unconfirmed, perception of extensive electoral fraud by the government together with pervasive and excessive government corruption and international isolation led to a junior officer coup on March 23, 1982."

The sources said the change was designed to "placate" congressional critics who believe that the human rights situation in Guatemala is grim. They said that in some instances the word "terrorist" was replaced with "guerrilla" or "insurgent."

Officially, the State Department had no comment on the complaints, but a State Department source acknowledged that changes were made.

This source, intimately familiar with how policy documents are drafted, defended Enders' role in the matter, saying changes were logical because the document was going to be issued jointly by the State Department and Pentagon.

Therefore, the source said, the State Department felt that its ideas also should be reflected in the paper, not only those of the Pentagon and the CIA.

The source also denied that the changes were made to cast military regimes in an unfavorable light or to improve the image of the guerrillas.

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